

# Out in the Garden

Rockport Garden Club, June 2021



## The Garden Cart: Baptisia

The genus, *Baptisia*, commonly known as false indigo includes 15 species and several naturally occurring hybrids all of which are found east of the Rocky Mountains. Five of these species are most often used in horticulture: *B. alba*, *B. australis*, *B. bracteata*, *B. sphaerocarpa* and *B. tinctoria*. The name comes from the Greek word meaning to dye. Native Americans and early settlers used these plants to create colorful dyes though it was not a good substitute for true indigo.

*Baptisia* is not an impressive plant in the garden center. It takes several years to develop because it is putting all its energy into developing a very deep taproot. Please don't despair. In three to four years those few spindly spikes you purchased will no longer look like Charlie Brown's Christmas tree. The abundant stems will eventually resemble a herbaceous "bush" so consider it a specimen plant. Its long taproot makes it difficult though not impossible to move so choose the site carefully. It is a plant that gives structure to the perennial border.

This perennial wildflower is interesting throughout the seasons. The shoots emerging in spring look like asparagus spears. In June, the pea shape 3/4 inch blooms are showstoppers appearing on spikes extending well above a foliage mound of clover like trifoliolate leaves. The seed pods as they mature will turn black which

is an interesting contrast against snow. The flowers, foliage and pods are excellent materials for flower arrangements.



A well grown specimen can outlive your car. I planted the blue flowering *Baptisia australis*, in my garden twenty years ago and it has never been bothered by diseases or pests. After fifteen years of splendid blooms, I did hire two men to divide the plant as it had just outgrown the space so it was

not totally maintenance free.

### Attributes:

**Height:** 3 to 4 feet depending on cultivar

**Spread:** 3 to 4 feet depending on cultivar

**Hardiness Zone:** 3 to 9

**Bloom Time:** May to June

**Exposure:** Full Sun

**Moisture:** Average to Dry

**Soil:** Average but well drained

**Maintenance:** Low- snap off hollow old stems in late winter

**Uses:** Erosion Control-Tap root stabilizes soil

**Benefits:** Host Plant for many Butterflies

**Seed Pods -** hiding spot and food source for insects

**Deer and Rabbit Resistant**

**Diseases:** No serious problems

There are many species and hybrids to choose from in a range of colors and sizes. New introductions are being made each year. The Chicago Botanical Garden and Mount Cuba have both done trials to determine which of these plants have merit.

—Patty Hock

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## The Garden Cart: Baptisia



Blueberry Sundae



Ivory Tower



'Lunar Eclipse'



'Purple Smoke'



Cherries Jubilee



Screamin' Yellow